Volunteer Stream Monitoring and Local Participation in Natural Resource Issues

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Biographical Sketch of Presenting Author

Kristine Stepenuck coordinates Wisconsin's Water Action Volunteers (WAV) Program, which includes citizen stream monitoring, storm drain stenciling, and river clean up programs. In addition to her role within Wisconsin, she works with partners at the University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension towards enhancing the capacity of volunteer water quality monitoring within Extension programs across the nation. She holds a B.S. in water resources management from the University of New Hampshire and a M.S. in Natural Resources from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

Abstract

This research evaluates whether increased learning, local political participation, and more extensive social networks are related to participation in a volunteer stream monitoring project in Wisconsin. We hypothesize that participation in volunteer monitoring increases factual learning among experienced volunteers compared to inexperienced volunteers, that participation also is associated with increased community political participation in community natural resources management, and increased size of personal action networks. We find that participation does not significantly increase factual learning; rather, new volunteers and experienced volunteers were equally knowledgeable about stream-related topics. However, participation does significantly increase the political participation, personal networks, and feelings of community connectedness among volunteers. We consider our findings in light of the possibility for using volunteer monitoring to enhance local social capital and contribute to the adaptive management of water resources.